

# Four Thousand Weeks:

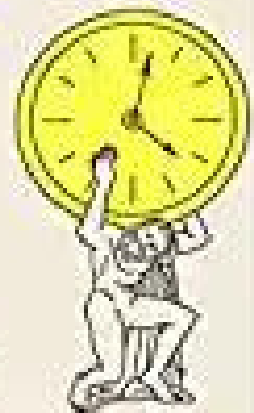
## Time Management for Mortals

Written by Oliver Burkeman

Four  
Thousand  
Weeks

Time  
Management  
for Mortals

Oliver  
Burkeman



**Key insights,  
takeaways, and actions**

**We humans have a bunch  
of bad ideas about time  
and it's twisting up in a  
variety of ways ...**

**For one, time has become a *thing*  
we *use* ...**

**... which creates a ton of pressure**

**Lawyers and consultant have  
“billable hours”.**

**The invisible assumption there is  
that time - and thus, life - is a  
*commodity to sell.***

**Two, we have clocks, schedules,  
joyless urgency galore, etc.**

**It constantly feels like we ought to  
*get more done ...***

**... and we have the illusion that we  
actually can.**

**We're trying to obtain a feeling of control that's remains *forever out of reach*.**

**Each effort to obtain it brings more stress.**

**And then, in our achievement culture, we address our busyness by making ourselves *busier*.**

**More demands leads to us doing more which leads to more demands.**

**It's a negative flywheel.**

**Like how the prize for getting through email is ... more email!**

**In present society, we have  
convenience galore.**

**The problem is ...**

**... it drains things of its meaning  
and seduces us into thinking *we can  
find room for everything* if we can  
only eliminate all of life's tedious  
tasks.**



**In present society, technology has helped us get things done more quickly than ever.**

**The problem is ...**

**... it's given us the illusion that *we're closer to being in control of our time.***

## **ACTION:**

**Deal with the distressing constraints of reality.**

**Confront our limits and make hard choices accordingly; don't default to doing more.**

**(Decide means to "cut off")**

**Also, we don't *have* time.**

***We are* time.**

**We're bound by finite time."4,000  
week" is the average human  
lifespan.**

**ACTION: face our finitude**

**We're lucky we even *get* to make  
hard choices.**

**Problem with the rock jar analogy is that too many rocks *feel* like those big rocks we're supposed to put in first.**

**Paradoxically, we need to become better procrastinators.**

**ACTIONS:**

- 1. neglect the right things**
- 2. limit our work-in-progress items to three at most**

**Our thoughts trip us up.**

**Our idea of the future is more romanticized than the actual future.**

**We tend to fantasize about a bunch of possible lives - ones we're *not* living - yet we do in a way that ignores the trade-offs and disappointments that would inevitably (still) exist.**

# Social media isn't helping. It:

- encourages *compulsive behaviors*
- persuades us to make *poor choices about our attention*
- *distorts* what we carry in our heads
- changes what we *define as important*

Our distractions certainly didn't start with the internet, though ...

... the call to be distracted comes *from within*.

It's usually us fleeing something painful about our present experience.

Like having to encounter our *finitude* or *limited control* or realizing "*this is it? damn...*"

Distractions are just *where we go* to seek psychological relief.

**Those wise ol' Buddhists say we  
humans suffer because:**

**we don't pay attention to the way  
things are going because**

***we're too busy wishing they were  
going differently.***



**All of our planning trips us up. It often exacerbates the anxiety it's supposed to allay.**

**Planning is, really, the demand to know, in advance, that things will turn out fine (... which can NOT be satisfied!)**

**ACTION:** When the uncontrollable future comes, remember we have what it takes to weather it.

**Focusing on using your time well  
results in you trying to *get through*  
*things* in order to arrive at some  
calmer point in the future ...**

**... which never arrives.**

**ACTION:**

**Ensure our peace of mind is not  
*dependent* on dealing w/ all of our  
demands.**

**A common - and dangerous - mindset  
is:**

***“When I do \_\_\_\_ or have \_\_\_\_, well, then  
I’ll finally be [happy, successful, secure,  
in control, safe, etc.]”***

**Many wealthy people treat their lives  
in the present as nothing but a vehicle  
toward a *future* state of happiness.**

**Remember rest?**

**Unfortunately, we've forgotten about it.**

**Rest now feels wasteful if it doesn't ultimately lead to some future value related to focus or productivity.**

**Leisure used to be our center of gravity.**

**Now, there's an intense pressure to use leisure time productively.**

**It's become yet another item on the to-do-list.**

**Remember when, before side hustles,  
we had hobbies?**

**We had the freedom to suck at them  
without caring.**

**Look at hiking.**

**There's no outcome to achieve. No  
being good at it.**

**All you "get" is the hike itself. :)**

**Altogether, we find ourselves  
pathologically *unable to relax*.**

**We look to work as our main source  
of meaning.**

**It seeps through life.**

**We fill every cranny with to-do's.**

**Fundamentally, we believe all this striving will lead us somewhere.**

**This constant striving is giving us permanent anxiety.**



**We're impatient.**

**Honking in traffic is a hilarious example.**

**Our feeble attempt to nudge the world into moving as fast as we'd like.**

**Our expectations about how quickly things ought to happen are rising.**

**ACTION:**

**Instead, embrace radical incrementalism & allow things to take the time they take.**

**Remember: time, ultimately, is a  
*network good*.**

**It needs to be used collaboratively.**

**ACTION: Sync up your time with the  
people you care about most.**

**We overvalue our existence.**

**We hold a grandiose bar for our life purpose, when, cosmically, we're insignificant.**

**Human history is a blink of an eye**

**That should be a delight to take in and allows us to *let go of this burden (e.g. "to change the world/universe") we hardly even realize we're carrying.***

**We keep trying to master or take control of our time so we feel:**

- **safe**
- **secure**
- **not vulnerable**

**... it's a delusion, though.**

**We'll never really be in control, or not vulnerable, or ultimately secure.**

**The human condition is painful but it's only unbearable when we (mistakenly) think there's a cure.**

**To close, consider these 5 key questions:**

- *Where am I pursuing comfort when what's called for is a little discomfort?*
- *Am I holding myself to standards of productivity or performance that are impossible to meet?*
- *In what ways have I yet to accept that I am who I am, not who I think I ought to be?*

**(cont'd)**

- *In which areas am I still holding back until I feel like I know what I'm doing?*
- *How would I spend my days differently if I didn't care so much about seeing my actions reach fruition?*

## **ACTION:**

**Give up hope of meeting every demand, completing all ambitions, of fully optimizing your life, and of realizing full emotional invincibility.**

## **ACTION;**

**Adopt more curiosity and less worry.**

**Curiosity = *wonder* what will happen next**

**Worry = *hope* X happens next**



**A lot to think about, huh!?**

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